

# PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE

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**Nemo Veritatem Regit**

**Nobody Governs Truth**

## **The Philosophy of the Self**

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In an age where many people are seeking a more profound way of being, they do not turn to an academic approach to philosophy; rather they turn to Eastern thought and to the emerging school of consciousness from psychology. Perhaps it is time to ask once again, what is philosophy?

Does philosophical counseling, or philosophical midwifery, presuppose a philosophy consistent with the exploration of human problems, and exploring the nature and reach of the Self? Or, can philosophy include in its vision the idea of the Self, and a dialectic designed to reach truth by following a purely rational logos? Can such a philosophy still be called a philosophy if it ignores the historical development of European philosophy?

Let us start fresh and be clear about what is meant by philosophy, and look upon its name, since the English equivalent for “philosophy” is the love of wisdom, “sophy”, or “sophia”. If we proceed to define philosophy in those words, then only those systems of thought whose goal is wisdom need be called philosophy.

Surely, if we adopt this distinction then the popular slogan that everyone has their own philosophy is an empty claim, something without the shadow of meaning. However, if we apply that name strictly then nearly all contemporary philosophy is misnamed, because they have no place for wisdom in what they call philosophy. Still, we need to ask: “what does it mean to say there can be a love for wisdom?” It has been said that whatever is derived and consistent with the experience of the luminous light of pure Being is wisdom, and its beauty awakens an intense love that can never be forgotten. It is transformative, since those who experience it realize they have gained a vision of ultimate reality. The attempt to understand that experience and to explain how it relates to our everyday world is one of the goals of this philosophy. The philosophy that attempts this goal is Platonic philosophy.

Now, it is important to note that Plato is not a teacher, but rather one who promotes learning. His style of writing promotes learning because it is not at all a simple task to understand his complex analogies, profound allegories, myths, and symbols. The student must seek through the whole of his work for the missing terms to complete his analogies and allegories in order to complete his structures of thought. The consequence of solving these riddles is the dawn of a new kind of understanding that we call philosophy of the Self. This philosophy started with Zenophanes, Parmenides, and Plato.

Zenophanes started philosophy with his saying that it is the whole that sees, hears, and thinks. His contemporaries considered this idea of the whole to be mind. Parmenides and Plato developed the principles of this philosophy and offered a way to reach into the nature of the Self.

It is one thing to realize what sees, hears, and thinks, and quite another thing to understand how that Self stands apart from all else and is also inherent in the very nature of all things; for it is the Self that forms and shapes all things as it itself unfolds itself through divine luminosity, through the various ways it appears, and even through the false images of the Self that bring havoc and suffering to all who are capable of self-reflection.

However, it is not at all an easy thing to discover what should be obvious to us all—we do have a Self. Indeed, each of us has a Self, yet is it not strange that few seek to realize the true nature of the Self and how it functions in our lives? The fault is that we have hidden from ourselves the mystery of the Self. When we hear that ancient call to “Know Thyself,” we dismiss it because we do not know if it is worth the knowing, nor do we know how to realize it.

It was once something an entire culture knew and could discuss, but that age is past and we stand today with little understanding of the depth of the richness of that Hellenic culture.

Those philosophers of the past who held it their sacred duty to pass on their knowledge of the Self have now been translated but the translators have failed to mention this most noble idea of the Self. What they ignored has transformed something unique and profoundly important for each of us into something empty of meaning. The result is that it has transformed their philosophy into an empty intellectual task of the most abstract kind.

To move forward we need to recover the past, and say what needs to be said even though there will be many who will object to such a revival of classical culture. The new vision needs a truly philosophical translation to restore the role of the Self in classical philosophy. To continue the scholarly use of translations that ignore translating the word “Self” is a betrayal of philosophy.

The most fully developed spiritually significant philosopher of that age is Plato, and in his dialogues we can see the idea of the Self is raised to its sacred position.

Let us turn to Plato to learn what the Self is and how the knowledge of the Self is obtained. It is in his dialogue, *Parmenides*, that he discloses what the Self is and in his *Republic* how one can come to the knowledge of the Self.

In his *Republic* he says that the apprehension and recognition of the Self comes to the philosopher in the vision of the most brilliant light of Being and of Truth. The vision is of the mind and is a turning about to realize itself. This vision can also be described as the intellect intellecting the intelligible, which Plato calls beholding the Good, or the Idea of the Good. The word “idea” is taken from the Greek and means not a concept, but the mind’s ability to behold what Plato calls the realities. Plato calls the greatest learning the study of the Idea of the Good. The difference between the Idea of the Good and the Good itself is, of course, that it is right to deem the light of being and truth as the Idea of the Good but it is not right to consider them as the Good, for the Good has a higher honor and worth than the Idea of the Good.

Surely it seems strange to us to say the ultimate metaphysical term is the One Self, yet it is precisely this very thing that Plato asserts in his *Parmenides*. When Parmenides is asked to share his own hypothesis, he says that it concerns the One Self, and whether the One is or is not. Basing his

reasoning on what he calls his logos, he then demonstrates in the first hypothesis that all that is denied of the One is applied to the Self. He concludes, carrying along all the negatives, saying that the Self can neither be named, nor known, nor perceived, nor opined, nor can real beings perceive her, nor can existence be attributed to it. When his hypothesis is judged as unlikely, he explores the eight consequences that would follow from the rejection of his hypothesis. It is through his way of reasoning, the dialectic, that he claims is the way to come to know truth.

The practice of his dialectic prepares the way to beholding the nature of real Being, or the Idea of the Good. Beholding the Idea of the Good follows the practice of separating the soul from the body, to accustom the soul to gather itself together and then to collect the Self by itself to dwell alone by Self. This process is called purification in Plato's dialogue, *Phaedo*, and he defines it as true philosophy. In the experience of dwelling alone with itself by the Self one remains always akin with that reality, and abides and remains becoming it, or becoming the Idea of the Good.

While it would appear that the seeker in this philosophy is a solitary figure working alone, it is rather, as he puts it in his *Apology*, that he is being continually assisted by spiritual insights gained through dreams, visions, and his inner voice. The importance of dream study in this philosophy is captured in his *Republic* when he says that before retiring for sleep it is proper to prepare oneself by beautiful sayings, meditations, and to reach out for one's inner thoughts so that one's dreams will likely reach truth of one's past, present, and future.

The philosopher's quest is depicted in the *Republic* in the Allegory of the Cave and the Upper World. Beginning with being released from the chains that fetter him, he turns to discover that what he had taken as reality are nothing but shadows cast on the wall of the cave that have been produced by hidden figures carrying objects on their heads that are illuminated by a distant fire. These objects are symbolic figures that represent the four kinds of dysfunctional families. As the carriers talk, their echoes are taken to be the voices of those shadows on the wall of the cave, which express the views of those who can manipulate those symbols to gain power in the social world, the sophists. Clearly, the goal of the philosopher is to shed those family/clan beliefs that are brought together in false images of the Self. All of our acts and thoughts are filtered through false images of ourselves, and they are justified by such false images.

Thus, our philosophy is to discover the true Self, to come to know thyself through our studies and meditations, through our dream and daydream study, so that we can discard all false images of ourselves and abide by the Self as the Self. This path is a return to the classical age, and to awaken our own time to a more profound way of being and acting. It is in this endeavor that the members of the Noetic Society have written books, articles, and made videos of our work.

However, to adopt such a philosophy is to leave to others what has been called the great conversation of European thought, and to return to the golden age of Hellenic philosophy is tantamount to the rejection of Christianity, for to pursue the quest to Know Thyself does not require faith. However, to avoid antagonizing the many it may be safer for academia to relegate the works of the philosophy of the Self to the lowest shelf along with Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Indeed, the fame that came to Gibbon was soon eclipsed when readers discovered that the fall of the Roman Empire could be attributed to the clash and chaos brought about by the rise of Christianity.

**Bibliographical note:**

All the quotes from Plato's *Republic*, *Parmenides*, and *Phaedo* are from the Juan and Maria Balboa translations of those dialogues, except footnote 13.

For copies see [noeticsociety.org/members/juan-balboa-translations/](http://noeticsociety.org/members/juan-balboa-translations/)

**Editor's Note:**

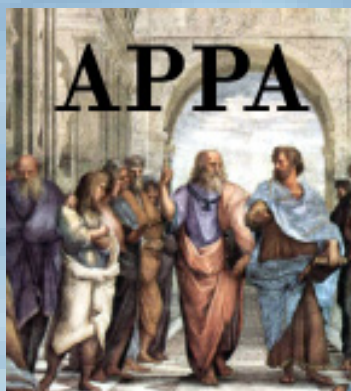
This brief article is a sequel to a lengthier treatment: Pierre Grimes, "The Betrayal of Philosophy: Rediscovering the Self in Plato's *Parmenides*," *Philosophical Practice*, July 2016, 11.2: 1752-58.

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**Pierre Grimes**, Ph.D., is the founder of the philosophical midwifery movement, which is an adaptation of Socratic midwifery, and is a mode of philosophical counseling. The name "Philosophical Midwifery" comes from Plato's dialogue, *The Theaetetus*. The Noetic Society was founded in Huntington Beach in 1967 for the study of dialogue and the exploration of the dialectic. When the Noetic Society was incorporated in 1978, Pierre became the Director of its Philosophical Midwifery Program, where he demonstrated and taught the art of philosophical midwifery. Pierre has authored numerous publications and lectures, and is a Director of APPA.







# PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE

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### Aims and Scope

*Philosophical Practice* is a scholarly, peer-reviewed journal dedicated to the growing field of applied philosophy. The journal covers substantive issues in the areas of client counseling, group facilitation, and organizational consulting. It provides a forum for discussing professional, ethical, legal, sociological, and political aspects of philosophical practice, as well as juxtapositions of philosophical practice with other professions. Articles may address theories or methodologies of philosophical practice; present or critique case-studies; assess developmental frameworks or research programs; and offer commentary on previous publications. The journal also has an active book review and correspondence section.

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The American Philosophical Practitioners Association is a non-profit educational corporation that encourages philosophical awareness and advocates leading the examined life. Philosophy can be practiced through client counseling, group facilitation, organizational consulting or educational programs. APPA members apply philosophical systems, insights and methods to the management of human problems and the amelioration of human estates. The APPA is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization.

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